

Bucknell University

Bucknell Digital Commons

Faculty Journal Articles

Faculty Scholarship

Fall 2011

Preservation, Passivity, and Pessimism

Sheila Lintott

Bucknell University, sl025@bucknell.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/fac_journ



Part of the [Environmental Studies Commons](#), [Esthetics Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Feminist Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Other Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lintott, Sheila. "Preservation, Passivity, and Pessimism." *Ethics and the Environment* (2011) : 95-114.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Bucknell Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Journal Articles by an authorized administrator of Bucknell Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcadmin@bucknell.edu.



INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
OFFICE OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Preservation, Passivity, and Pessimism

Author(s): Sheila Lintott

Source: *Ethics and the Environment*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 95-114

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/ethicsenviro.16.2.95>

Accessed: 02-07-2016 18:07 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Indiana University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ethics and the Environment*

PRESERVATION, PASSIVITY, AND PESSIMISM¹

SHEILA LINTOTT

Many committed and passionate environmental thinkers currently champion restoration as an appropriate and positive model for human-nature interaction and interdependence. Recent philosophical defenses of restoration sidestep the issues that have been raised about the possibility of restoring degraded nature to a state that is identical, ontologically or evaluatively, to some pre-degraded state. Informed by feminist theory, I expose and explore some problematic assumptions and associations found in common defenses of restoration and defend the thesis that preservation is the more promising avenue to character remediation and the forging of a harmonious human-nature culture. I allow that many restoration projects will be appropriate under a preservationist program; but insist that preservation should be the main approach endorsed.

Whether it's the 2010 BP oil spill or mountaintop removal in the Appalachians, it is clear that nature has been degraded and human activity threatens further degradation. Sound theoretical guidance is desperately needed to inform sound practice. Environmental philosophy is a good place to look for guidance, particularly to debates concerning restoration. These debates often focus on values promulgated via restoration. Questions are asked about the value *produced by* restoration efforts: Does restored nature have the same quality or quantity of value as pre-degraded nature? About the value arising *in the process of* restoration activity: Does participating in restoration activity encourage increased respect for nature? About the values that *motivate* restoration policy: Does confidence

ETHICS & THE ENVIRONMENT, 16(2) 2011 ISSN: 1085-6633

©Indiana University Press All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

Direct all correspondence to: Journals Manager, Indiana University Press, 601 N. Morton St.,
Bloomington, IN 47404 USA iuporder@indiana.edu

that we can heal nature smack of arrogance? And about the attitude *endorsed by* restorationists: Does restoration offer us hope for healthy and positive human-to-nature relationships while other approaches do not? Varying answers to these questions tend to recommend either restoration or preservation as the dominant environmental policy, with the other being subsumed under it.²

The history of the preservation-restoration debate is complex, with the two sometimes aligned and sometimes with one more publicly favored than the other. Today, restoration seems more popular, with many committed and passionate environmental thinkers championing it as providing the most appropriate guidelines for human action regarding nature. The case for restoration takes as basic the idea that where one contributes to a problem or benefits from such contributions, one has an obligation to contribute to its solution. I too take this as a given, but want to question whether restoration is generally the better means to discharging this obligation than is preservation. Recent attempts to articulate aims of restoration that go beyond returning degraded nature to a state that is identical, ontologically or evaluatively, to some pre-degraded state are admittedly more promising than their predecessors, but I remain unconvinced that restoration should trump preservation as a means to these ends. My thesis is that preservation is the more promising approach when the aim is character remediation and the forging of a culture that sincerely values nature and living harmoniously within it. I allow that many restoration projects will be appropriate under a preservationist program; but insist that preservation should be the main approach endorsed.

In section one, I question the extent to which restoration will help in providing character remediation to those of us (basically, all of us) who have contributed to the environmental problems we face. I offer reasons to doubt that restoration promises to be as broadly effective in achieving these ends as its enthusiasts predict. In section two, I explore the extent to which restorationist criticisms of preservation are informed by a problematic value dualism, one that not only calls the soundness of their case into question, but also suggests they remain, albeit unknowingly, tied to a worldview that needs to be jettisoned if we are to move in the direction of a harmonious human-nature community. In section three, I argue that a primary focus on preservation is not unduly pessimistic as some restorationists suggest; instead I characterize preservationism as maintaining

what Nietzsche calls pessimism of strength, rather than the optimism of weakness I unearth under a primary commitment to restoration.

CONCERNING THE OPTIMISM OF RESTORATIONISM

In a recent article, John Basl discusses environmental restoration in terms of restitution, which he defines as “the act of making right in response to making wrong” (Basl, 138). Analyzing restitution into two components, a reparative and a remediative component, he argues that in some cases of wrongdoing, notably in many cases of environmental degradation, only remediation is required. Remediation is always required when “the wrong committed is not an anomaly, but rather the wrongdoing is intimately tied to the character of the wrongdoer” (142). And remediation aims at character remediation of the guilty parties: for example, someone who ridicules a homeless person behind the person’s back would benefit from working in a homeless shelter for a while, which we would hope would help remediate his character in the needed manner. Other proponents of restoration discuss the issues within the context of creating a community with or of nature. For example, Andrew Light views the value of restoration in terms of creating a culture of nature, a culture in which an appropriate relationship between humans and nature is restored. Light insists it is a mistake to see restoration as “only an attempt to restore nature itself, rather than an effort to restore an important part of the human relationship with nonhuman nature” (Light, 49). According to Light, the value of restoration is found primarily in the contribution it makes towards “the revitalization of the human culture of nature” (Light, 49).

Basl’s and Light’s attempts to defend restoration center on the effects restoration might have on people—on their characters or their relationships with nature. Thus, they sidestep the metaphysical and epistemological objections made against restoration by critics such as Eric Katz and Robert Elliot. For example, Katz and Elliot argue that because humans are ontologically distinct from nature, human intervention in nature can only produce artifacts; therefore, the result of restoration is valuable as an artifact not nature. So, strictly speaking, restoration is metaphysically impossible. Another question has been raised about whether we have the requisite knowledge base to restore nature, pointing out that much of the harm humans cause results from acting in ignorance or arrogance. As Holmes Rolston III points out, restorations pale in comparison with the

original: "The diversity of species may not be there, nor the complexity of ecosystemic interrelations. So the restored system will lack integrity" (Rolston 2000, 128). Moreover, the decision regarding to which pre-degraded moment in history to restore seems arbitrary. According to these criticisms, successful restoration is metaphysically impossible and difficult to dangerous epistemologically. However, according to Basl's account, these critics focus on what is often an inessential component of environmental restoration: reparation. And according to Light, they fail to appreciate the role restoration might play in restoring a more appropriate human-nature culture. I applaud these recent efforts to defend restoration on more pragmatic grounds, yet I remain skeptical. My skepticism is due primarily to the scope of the character remediation needed and the varying ways restoration might affect or fail to affect individuals' characters.

Restorationists maintain that restoration can be deeply satisfying to human participants. William Jordan III, who characterizes restoration as "simply the active attempt to compensate for human influence on an ecological system in order to return the system to its historic condition," finds that restoration through prairie burns afford us an awesome opportunity for beginning to build a human-nature community (Jordan 2000b, 217). By illustrating how nature needs us, prairie burns allow us to celebrate this fact of dependency and to enjoy a related feeling of community with nature.

The burns are really the quintessential or emblematic act of prairie restoration. They have become a rite of spring, eagerly anticipated by the growing number of "prairie people" involved in restoration efforts in the Midwest, and are often surrounded by a festive, joyful, atmosphere. Reflecting on this development, several years ago, Fred Turner put forward what I believe is a good explanation for it...the need of the prairie for fire dramatizes *its* dependence on *us*, and so liberates us from our position as naturalists or observers of the community into a role of real citizenship." (Jordan 2000b, 213)

I find this confusing. I can't help but wonder how seeing *any* human action as dramatizing nature's dependence on us will help cultivate the sort of virtues needed to build an appropriate human-nature community and to dispel the consumerist vices that have contributed to the environmental crises we face. I can see why working to counter past degradation makes one feel good, satisfied that one has helped to clean up a serious

mess, a mess that one has in all likelihood contributed to, but I don't see how this shows that nature is dependent on us. And I don't see it as a reason for celebration as Turner and Jordan do. Does Jordan mean that we should celebrate the fact that nature is dependent on us for its existence? It isn't—however you define it, nature pre-existed us and will, in all probability, survive us. Does Jordan mean that nature is dependent on us for its health? Nature is sometimes negatively affected by our behavior and we can sometimes undo some of this damage, but this is not the same thing as saying that nature is dependent on us. I might be deserving of reparation from someone who has wronged me without being dependent on that person at all. It is true that humans and nonhuman nature are interrelated in a variety of (known and unknown) ways, but interdependence is not the same thing as dependence. Does Jordan mean that in its current degraded state, nature is dependent on us? Admittedly, it seems to be to some extent. For example, after destructive and pervasive alterations, prairies may need our intervention in order to return to and sustain important ecosystemic processes. But celebrating this dependency without admitting we created it is to avoid taking full responsibility for our actions—it cause for concern, not celebration.

Perhaps I am being too literal; perhaps Jordan is merely suggesting that seeing nature as something we can affect—positively and negatively—illustrates its dependence on us, which is conducive to our bonding with nature by cultivating a sense of responsibility for our actions regarding it. Maybe seeing nature's dependence on us can motivate us to act more responsibly in the way that grasping his baby's dependence and vulnerability can motivate a father to act responsibly toward the baby. Parents frequently are touched by their children's vulnerability in this way. However, nature simply is not vulnerable in this way. Nature does not *need us* to survive; nature will continue long after us and would probably, in some sense, be better off without us. Truth be told, *we* are the vulnerable, dependent ones in the human-nature relationship. Restorationists sometimes seem reluctant to admit this.

Some restorationists emphasize the collaborative nature of their practice, seeing restoration ultimately as a way to (re-)enfranchise and (re-)liberate nature. For example, Trish Glazebrook describes the practice of restoration in the oil industry as follows: "The actual practice of restoration in the oil industry does not 'make nature' at all, but rather involves

providing the right conditions, and then allowing the time for nature to heal itself. The process is more about patience than mastery and control” (Glazebrook, 30). One sometimes finds evidence of such an attitude in the best versions of restoration; however, one should look carefully at the sentiments expressed in public and professional debates on the topic and at how the practice actually plays out to discern whether restoration is always as humble, collaborative, and patient as Glazebrook’s recount makes it seem. For example, take Turner’s excitement and optimism about restoration as a normative paradigm; it is, literally, otherworldly:

If we are alone [i.e. if we are the only intelligent life in the universe], then we carry a gigantic responsibility. We are the custodians of life in the universe, and the only plausible vector by which life may propagate itself to other worlds.... But one day the long discipline of restoration may bear a strange and unexpected fruit, and an alien sun may shine on miles of blowing prairie. (Turner, 203)

I am sincerely taken aback by such a suggestion and do not detect any humility or collaboration in it. Perhaps a few readers are thinking that colonizing other worlds is ethically unproblematic, so long as no persons or sentient beings are colonized in the process. However, there are two things to note about this. First, the attitude expressed here is compatible with a willingness to accept degradation as given and to simply move on and away from it via technological means—an attitude that sees human life as the most important life on this planet (and perhaps on others). This is not an attitude that is conducive to healthy human-nature relationships. And this leads to another issue, if we deal with past mistakes by leaving them and moving on to new venues, what’s to stop humanity from continuing on in this manner—world-hopping, as it were? Add to this the fact that many astronomers now believe that in all probability we are not alone, that is, that we do not represent the only intelligent life in the universe. If so, then dreams of colonizing other planets need to be checked by the possibility that other beings may already inhabit those worlds.

I find myself here reminded of Val Plumwood’s wise counsel against even contemplating colonizing distant planets before we can learn to live well on this one. As she says, “Perhaps the most important task for human beings is not to search the stars to converse with cosmic beings but to learn to communicate with the other species that share this planet with us” (Plumwood 2002, 189). I find similar reasoning applicable to the debate

over restoration and I suggest that the most important task for human beings is not to seek greater mastery over nature to create nature anew (here or elsewhere), but to learn to coexist peacefully with and to fully respect the nature that exists here and persists in each of us. I partially agree with Jordan that “the real challenge of environmentalism is not to preserve nature by protecting it from human beings or rescuing it from their influence, but to provide the basis for a healthy relationship between nature and culture” (Jordan 2000b, 208). My agreement is partial because, at this point in time, forging “a healthy relationship between nature and culture” necessarily involves privileging the preservation and protection of nature from human influence.

Moreover, we also need to worry about the likely cultural uptake of the practice of restoration; that is, how non-participants in the research and physical work of restoration, which will be the vast majority of people, are likely to interpret and understand the process of restoration. Most likely participants will already be relatively virtuous concerning environmental matters. Those most in need of character remediation might be aware of the projects but are far less likely to freely participate in them. From the point of view of a non-participating observer, Robert Elliot’s feared “replacement thesis” might come alive—that is, restoration projects might just provide what seem to be valid grounds to excuse the initial degradation and even justify future degradation (Elliot 2000). A non-participating observer who has heard talk of, for example, efforts to return wolves to Yellowstone Park might be impressed with the work and the science involved, and might then find in restoration a source of optimism *regardless of* how she or other humans continue to behave. Given how the shock and awe of war seems to impress the public, it is reasonable to worry that many could interpret restoration as the human ability to pillage and then restore nature, giving us the justification for consumerism in every corner of life—from big cars and big houses to big planes flying us to remote locations for big vacations in restored nature that can be re-restored when need be. Of course, this does not mean that restoration does justify degradation, but it might easily be interpreted that way. So, restoration needs to be secondary to preservation unless we want to be satisfied with restored and re-restored nature, which will ultimately leave us with nothing tangible on which to base restorations.

CONCERNING THE PASSIVITY OF PRESERVATIONISM

Restorationist rhetoric makes the contributions of preservation and, in fact, of nature less visible and often difficult to detect. This has been accomplished, not intentionally, but effectively nonetheless, by their implicit reliance on a dubious distinction between the active and the passive. Along with the hierarchical structure in which that dualism tends to be arranged, the active/passive dualism motivates much enthusiasm for restoration and underlies much dissatisfaction with preservation. In other words, given the choice between activity and passivity, activity is thought to be plainly the better of the two; for the same reasons, given the choice between restoration and preservation, restoration is thought to be plainly the better of the two. Valuing passivity or behaving in a way that is deemed passive, which frequently requires a great deal of effort and work, is seen as weak and ineffective, frequently as effeminate.

The active/passive dualism functions as a normative dualism in restorationist criticism of preservation. Especially insidious when found supporting seemingly benign or even beneficial activities, normative dualisms often justify or define oppressive practices as necessary, normal, or at least as the best alternative given the circumstances. Normative dualisms are conceived oppositionally and hierarchically, which is to say that each member of a pair is defined and understood in terms of being unlike the other and one is considered superior to the other.

Questioning these normative dualisms can raise awareness of the continuity between the terms and thus a rejection of any hard and fast opposition or hierarchy between them. Feminists argue that, in traditional Western philosophy, the hierarchical male/female dualism has been paralleled by the value dualisms of culture/nature, mind/body, active/passive, and rational/emotional. These parallels can be seen in the common associations of men with culture, mind, activity, and rationality and women with nature, body, passivity, and emotionality. The oppositionality here informs the normativity. Men should not stoop to being feminine; they should not be passive and emotional. Gendered normative dualisms have been influential and intricately involved throughout the history of western philosophy. Obvious examples quickly come to mind: Plato's attack on art because its emotional appeal threatens the health of the (rational) soul; Descartes' identification of himself as essentially mental and claim that his body is inessential; Aristotle's judgment that the active is always superior to the passive; Kant's reliance on the relative importance of culture. These

are just a few examples of philosophers relying on normative dualisms in an uncritical manner.

Dualisms, even hierarchical dualisms, alone are not the problem. It's only when merged with a logic of domination, the idea that "superiority justifies subordination," that differences become justifications or mandates and dualisms become normative (Warren, 22). A dualism becomes fully normative when it goes beyond abstractly classifying entities or evaluating entities to stipulate norms of behavior. The resulting domination can take the form of control, manipulation, coercion, annihilation, or limitation; note that any of these can be (and are) completed under the guise of assistance. Most dangerous is that within a worldview governed by a logic of domination, it seems perfectly natural that the male controls the female, culture manipulates nature, the mind coerces the body, the active annihilates the passive, and rationality limits emotion.

G. Stanley Kane finds the logic behind restoration worrisome due to its similarities with seriously problematic ways of thinking about nature. He argues that:

Striking parallels exist between the old domination program and restoration. The most basic is that in both systems humans hold the place of highest authority and power within the world. Also, neither view recognizes any limits to the scope or range of legitimate human manipulation in the world. This does not mean that there are no constraints—only beneficial manipulations should be undertaken—but it does mean that nothing is intrinsically off-limits. A further parallel is that because the fate of the world rests on humans, they must have a clear idea of what needs to be done. They must know what conditions are good (or at least what conditions are better) and then work to bring them about. Their activity, then, requires them to shape the world after ideas in their own mind. (Kane, 227; see also Katz 1997b)

In other words, despite claims to the contrary, despite good intentions, and despite some manner of improvements, the logic of restoration implements the allegedly jettisoned domination model according to which humans are superior to and thus justified in shaping nature as they see fit, whether they act on behalf of what they deem to be in their own or in nature's interest. This logic of domination is coupled with the hierarchical dualism of the active and the passive in restorationist criticisms of preservation.

An appreciation of the activity, the effort, and the work required in preservation is often lacking in restorationist critiques of preservationism. The debate has absorbed the active/passive dualism in its full normative force. Preservation is not a merely negative policy; it mandates and requires a great deal of activity. However, it is the sort of activity that too frequently goes unnoticed and almost entirely unappreciated. It is the sort of activity usually associated with the female side of the male/female dualism. It is activity that, although its interaction isn't always obvious, does positively or negatively affect others, through the agent's self-control, restraint, respect, and patience, all of which demand great strength and effort. It is not the case that these seemingly passive acts happen without effort, without agency, without activity, as it is often supposed. (Think, for example, about the lack of credit given to mothers because they are allegedly naturally nurturing, doing, it seems, what comes naturally to them; their care work is often construed passively, as if it happens through them, rather than being work that requires serious effort, intellect, and conscious sacrifice.)

Jordan maintains that a successful environmentalism will be one that satisfies individuals at a personal level, and he does not believe preservationism can.

At a personal level, [preservationism] survives in a culture that provides only an extremely limited repertory of ways for contacting nature—ways, I mean, that engage only a limited range of human interests, talents, and abilities. The result—unintended of course—is a kind of psychological elitism that accommodates those inclined by nature to the experience of observation and appreciation, but has less to offer the mechanics, nurturers, healers, hunters, gatherers, artists, craftsmen, pilots, planners, leaders, and ditch diggers among us. (And at a personal level, of course, it leaves those parts of each of us unsatisfied.) (Jordan 2000a, 31)

The conclusion is that restoration is the more promising policy when it comes to forging a culture of nature. Preservationism is inept; it offers an “extremely limited” list of ways to engage with nature and appeals only to a select few of us, and only to a small part of each of us psychologically—the part that is interested in the relatively passive habits of “observation and appreciation.”

Yet Jordan's charges of elitism should be turned on his own view. He suggests that “mechanics, nurturers, healers, hunters, gatherers, art-

ists, craftsmen, pilots, planners, leaders, and ditch diggers among us” are not “inclined by nature to the experience of observation and appreciation.” This divides people into those who ‘do’ and those who ‘think,’ with the doers digging ditches and the thinkers satisfied with observation and appreciation. This is a double insult. For one, the suggested division of labor is faulty, for ditch diggers, hunters, and mechanics certainly better observe and appreciate, i.e., think before they act, lest they dig into a gas line, hunt a pet, or damage an engine in their rush to act. Second, while preservationists, whether they spend their time writing books or walking in the woods (or, most likely, both), certainly do observe and appreciate nature, in doing so, they engage in a great many additional activities. In selecting subjects for study, they discriminate between subjects according to their capacities, behaviors, and an array of other aspects, exerting effort to avoid influencing the objects of their study, and they work to make what they study meaningful in a broader context and to a broad audience. These are some of the many things that preservationists *do* when they “observe and appreciate.” Also, the talents that a preservationist has are shared with those engaged in a variety of other activities Jordan mentions; for example, the ability to detect subtle signs of flourishing would also be beneficial for a healer.

Moreover, to cultivate environmental virtues, profound cultural and individual changes are in order. Given this, we should be concerned about restorationists’ willingness to cater to existing attitudes, perceived needs, and desires in the environmental policy they endorse. Those attitudes, perceived needs, and desires are at the very heart of the problem of environmental degradation; many of them underwrite the environmental crisis in which we find ourselves today. The fact that preservation doesn’t satisfy such preexisting desires is not necessarily to be counted against it; indeed it may be part of its strength.

Plumwood analyzes the active/passive normative dualism in her critique of the concept of the postmodern idea of a “cultural landscape,” maintaining that the concept obscures the active and creative processes in the land (Plumwood 2006). She prefers to think of land on a collaborative model in which landscapes are seen as “interactive” or “collaborative,” and land in general as “a field of (product, outcome child/offspring of) *multiple interacting and collaborating agencies* which can include humans but is never exhausted by them” (Plumwood 2006, 125).

Plumwood’s critique summarizes the historical connection between

the active/passive dualism and domination and also focuses on the illusion that land is passive matter upon which humans are permitted, even required to act and shape as we deem necessary. Her main thesis is that the contributions of the land are underacknowledged while those of humans are overacknowledged, but she attests to the complexity of the matter by emphasizing that in some cases the contributions of humans are underacknowledged. In these cases we might need to conceptually “‘denaturalize,’ to demote or supplement the emphasis on nature and note the presence of human influences which have been hidden, although this will rarely involve a complete denial of the influence of nature” (Plumwood 2006, 132). Her critique ultimately takes aim at postmodern cultural reduction, the notion that all land is artifactual because in some way(s) it has been influenced by human activity. The problem with this notion is that it obscures or even disappears the contributions of the land. She explains as follows:

But such a cultural reduction, which is often associated with certain forms of postmodernism, would abolish conceptual conditions for sensitivity to nature’s limits, and to the variations and interweavings of the human and nonhuman narratives an ecological consciousness aims to foster.... [P]ostmodernists... may think of themselves as in opposition to the dominant tradition, but are in fact at one with its dualizing approach in continuing to represent the Other, nature, as an absence or void, and to demote its agency. (Plumwood 2006, 138)

This view of the land as passive pervades restorationist rhetoric. According to the restorationist, as was discussed earlier, nature has been damaged by human intervention and will only be healed by the same. However, there is very little acknowledgment of the fact that nature has the ability to heal itself, often from the worst of human harm. For example, a recent study by John Kessler of Texas A&M University published in *Science* “concludes that the vast quantity of methane gas that spewed from the BP oil well in the Gulf of Mexico was gobbled up rapidly by bacteria” (NPR). These results are preliminary and there is some question about whether the current or bacteria are responsible for the disappearance of the gas, but “whatever happened to the natural gas, it does not seem to have caused obvious damage to the economically valuable ecosystems, near the surface or near the shore, in the Gulf of Mexico” (NPR).

Reflecting on Plumwood’s analysis, we can also begin to sense that the optimism of the restorationist is not justified as it glosses a difficult

truth: human intervention will not solve the problems human intervention has caused. Instead, we must recover a respect for “nature’s limits” and find hope in the belief that nature acts in its own interests. The thrust of the human contribution to environmentalism should come from preservationism’s active efforts to understand and protect nature, while these efforts will rightly be *supplemented by* restorationism.

CONCERNING THE PESSIMISM OF PRESERVATIONISM

Advocates of restoration say it introduces a “positive factor into the conservation equation,” in contrast to preservation which “at bottom it is deeply pessimistic” (Jordan 2003, 2). As one who accepts a “broadly preservationist environmental philosophy,” Ned Hettinger believes that “Nature is a subject owed moral concern fundamentally because of its independence from humanity and its autonomy from human domination and control” (Hettinger, 110). However, he worries that a preservationist philosophy like Katz’s leaves no “vision of a positive role for humanity in the natural world” and entails the view “that *all* human activity toward nature wrongs nature” (Hettinger, 110). Hettinger’s critique underscores the importance of finding “a benign human role in nature” and articulating “a vision of a constructive human relationship with nature, in addition to a characterization of our past failures of relationship” (Hettinger, 113, 110).

Turner, who explicitly criticizes preservationists for wallowing in guilt, tells us that preservationist science finds ecology

...essentially elegiac, essentially a eulogy to what we humans have destroyed; their science is a postmortem, their myth is of a primal crime by which we are all tainted: the murder of nature. We cannot expiate, let alone compensate for this crime; the best we can do is acknowledge it publicly by setting aside whatever relatively untouched places remain and keeping human beings out of them. For such perfectionists the study of nature is essentially passive and classificatory; action and experiment would be unwarranted.... It is possible to sympathize with such purists; they often serve as a conscience to humankind. But human beings are just as often ill-served by them—people are not at their best when motivated by guilt or alarm. If not actually paralyzed, they act mulishly, dutifully, without the joy and playfulness that liberate the imagination and start the flow of creative thought. (Turner, 197–98)

Contra Turner, remembering both what was lost and how it was lost, is often the more challenging and, I would argue, at times the more important response to nature degradation than an attempt to reverse the harm *in order to* erase the guilt. A proper attitude towards degraded nature must involve a respectful remembrance of what has been lost, which restoration risks masking, sometimes unintentionally. As Katz says, “Nature restoration is a compromise; it should not be a basic policy goal. It is a policy that makes the best of a bad situation; it cleans up our mess. We are putting a piece of furniture over the stain in the carpet, for it provides a better appearance. As a matter of policy, however, it would be much more significant to prevent the causes of the stains” (Katz 1997a, 106).

Admittedly, preservationists are not optimistic in the manner of some restorationists. For some restorationists, restoration is not merely a compromise. Some speak as if it is a paradigm of a healthy relationship with nature, a promising way to live in harmony with nature. For example, for Jordan, “ecosystem construction provides the basis for a healthy interaction between human beings and the rest of nature. The key idea here is that we can best come to understand ecosystems, and to enter into a relationship with them that engages the full array of human activities, by attempting to reconstruct them” (Jordan 2000b, 208). Indeed, Jordan sees great potential for restoration as “a performing art and as the basis for a new ritual tradition for mediating the relationship between nature and culture” (Jordan 2000b, 214; See also Jordan 2003, Ch. 7). Further, consider Jordan’s optimism regarding the restorative role of humans in nature:

...even more important—restoration, properly understood, turns out to be the key to the survival—or preservation—of *all* natural landscapes, not just those that have obviously been degraded or abused. (Jordan 2003, 14)

The optimism in restoration expressed by Turner and Jordan puts me in mind of Nietzsche’s reflections on the ambiguity of the ideas of pessimism and optimism. Returning years later to reflect on his *The Birth of Tragedy* in “Attempt at A Self Criticism”, Nietzsche reconsiders the appropriateness of his earlier discussions of optimism and pessimism, as well as the common positive and negative associations usually made with each respectively. He first wonders whether pessimism is most accurately understood as a positive, even progressive attitude:

Is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts...? Is there a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the *fullness* of existence? (17)

In other words, despite initial appearances, perhaps the more life-affirming philosophy is one of “a pessimism of strength”, according to which it is best to clearly assess and confront the reality of the situation in order to embrace it.

On the other hand, Nietzsche considers whether optimism is a philosophy that, in its very cheerfulness and hopefulness, requires a turning away from life, a denial of the seriousness of the problems that plague us. He wonders, therefore, whether optimism might be the more negative, even stunting philosophy—a sign of decline rather than progress.

Might not this very [Socratic optimism] be a sign of decline, of weariness, of infection, of the anarchical dissolution of the instincts? Is the resolve to be so scientific about everything perhaps a kind of fear of, an escape from, pessimism? A subtle last resort against—*truth*? And, morally speaking, a sort of cowardice and falseness? Amorally speaking, a ruse? (17–18)

As opposed to the pessimism of strength detectable in preservationism, the unbridled optimism of some restorationist enthusiasts can be characterized as an optimism of weakness, one that prefers to turn away from, rather than accept some of the truths of the matter. In this way, the optimism of restorationism can seem overly optimistic in the face of the real, lasting, and continuing damage human beings cause in nature. The more difficult option, which might be somewhat pessimistic, is found in the preservationist outlook that insists the best thing we can do now is to value leaving nature alone over further intervention. This requires a pessimism of strength and humility.

Picking up on the theme of the previous section, it is also worth noting that the optimism of restoration is due in large part to our penchant for the active: we can be optimistic because *we* can fix the harm; *we* can right the wrong. The active/passive dualism is embodied in the logic seeking to justify restoration as the best, sometimes as *the only*, acceptable way to deal with the harm we’ve caused. We can also detect remnants of the old domination model of the human to culture relationship, a model

that taught us such falsities as that nature needs to be humanized to be valuable, that cultural forces are always permitted to alter natural ones, and that acting is always better than being acted upon. Faced with a problem, for example, degraded nature, we fix it. It seems the respectable thing to do. We can't just stand by and do nothing, we must rectify the situation. We'd like to believe that this is because we want to take responsibility for our actions and to do the right thing. However, it is also due to the fact that focusing instead on preservation may require admitting that we aren't as powerful, knowledgeable, or capable as we like to believe. If we aren't as powerful, knowledgeable, or capable as the task requires, we should not pretend we can fix the situation or solve the problem. Finding a solution, healing the harm, righting the wrong, all make us feel strong, but it is not real strength. Real strength is needed to admit that we caused harm that *we* cannot remedy, that here is a mess we've created to which we do not have any ready solution, complete cure, or adequate restitution.

Admittedly, preservationism's outlook is not excessively optimistic, but it does have a vision for positive human-nature interaction; preservationism allows for joy without delusion. Indeed, preservation refuses to ignore the damage humans have caused, through industry, through greed, through selfishness, through shortsightedness; but in light of this refusal, the preservationist finds intense joy, even sublimity, when confronted with the rare experience of preserved nature. Moreover, without inserting oneself in the role of the savior, the preservationist retains hope for a wild future. Consider Rolston's discussion of forests, which I cannot help myself from quoting extensively:

In the primeval forest humans know the most authentic of wilderness emotions, the sense of the sublime. By contrast, few persons get goose pimples indoors, in art museums, in fashionable shopping centers, or at the city park... The sublime is perennial in encounter with nature because wherever people step to the edge of the familiar, everyday world, they risk encounter with grander, more provocative forces that touch heights and depths beyond normal experience, forces that transcend us and both attract and threaten....

....But few forests are primeval—the more prosaic aesthetician will protest. Rare is the forest that has not been reshaped by human agency—by cutting up trees with chain saws, by cutting up forests with roads, by fencing forests around and running cattle through them, by intentionally planting more desirable species. There are also

the unintended changes, like the chestnut blight, or the understory invaded by honeysuckle.

Still, the forest, shaped by management and mismanagement though it may be, proves more able than the field or pasture to retain the natural element. Nature takes back over and does its thing: if it is not pristine activity, then still something relatively wild... (Rolston 2004, 191).

Hope in this context requires patience, the patience to allow nature to act for itself, in other words, the strength to be passive. Human beings still need to learn to respect and appreciate the autonomy of nature and its value independent of us; this lesson is more basic than any endeavors such as restoration. Preservation of the relatively natural places, processes, and entities that still exist should be the primary focus of environmentalism.

CONCLUSION: AN OUNCE OF PRESERVATION...

To many people, restoration policy charts a course that is *obviously* the right one. Restoration is seen as the proper response to the harm we've caused and restoration efforts evoke in most people a sense of pride. However, sometimes we are misled into accepting an inadequate solution by our deep desire that there be a solution. My reaction to enthusiasm over restoration is one of very deep discomfort. Yes, I am sometimes struck by hints of arrogance I detect in some enthusiasm for restoration policy, but the overwhelming feeling I experience is one of uncomfortable sadness and worry. I feel the sort of sadness that one feels at witnessing the acceptance of an alleged fix which does not leave ample acknowledgement of the harm committed and its causes, room for remembrance, or grief over an irreplaceable loss. I feel a nagging worry that we are accepting a policy and endorsing a way of conceiving the human-nature relationship that really is too good to be true.

I believe that we should also hesitate before striving for complete liberation from guilt. Katz agrees with Turner and Jordan that restoration policies make us "feel good," that "the prospect of restoration relieves the guilt we feel about the destruction of nature" (Katz 1997a, 94). But Katz worries about the justification and effect of this relief, and so do I. Should we "feel good" and enjoy the benefits of guilt alleviation? Do we deserve it? Is it wise? Might this not allow, even encourage us to forget our past wrongs? If so, might we not become more accepting of nature degrada-

tion? The answers to these questions will depend on the extent to which we've undergone the necessary character remediation and have cultivated a healthy human-nature relationship. Remembering that our unhealthy attitudes and desires led to the environmental destruction in question will remain important, which is not to say we should hang our heads in shame for eternity.

Instead, we should follow preservationism's model and take a more passive role toward nature, which requires working extremely hard to let nature unfold on its own, including at times allowing nature to heal itself from the harm we've caused. In order to achieve the sort of character remediation Basl endorses and to cultivate the culture of nature Light envisions, substantial changes need to take place. These changes must occur not only on the behavioral level, for if behavioral changes are to be enduring, it is more important that change occur on the theoretical and psychological levels. Our ability to be more passive, as passivity ought to be understood, as necessarily involving strength, patience, effort, resolve, and humility, requires cultivation. This is the path to a true respect for nature, to cultivating a respect for nature on its own terms and its unique value. Practically this often means, as Katz puts it, "We leave nature alone" (Katz 2002, 144). *Fully* adopting a preservationist mindset *is* the change we need. Restoration should take its place within a broad preservationist paradigm, not the other way around.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to a number of people who have helped me further develop the ideas and refine the arguments in this essay. In particular, I want to thank the anonymous reviewer for *Ethics & the Environment* who provided generous, pointed, and provocative commentary on a previous version of this article; the result of my having attended to the criticisms and suggestions in that commentary is a much improved essay. I am also appreciative for the feedback of John Basl, Ned Hettinger, Eric Katz, and Jason Simus.

NOTES

- 1 My focus here is on the debate between environmentalists who favor either preservation or restoration and criticize the other. Therefore, in the context of this paper, when I refer to "preservationists" or "preservation" or "preservationism," I am referring to those preservationists who criticize restoration as an environmental policy; when I refer to "restorationists" or "restoration" or

“restorationism,” I am referring to those restorationists who criticize preservation as an environmental policy.

REFERENCES

- Basl, John. 2010. “Restitutive Restoration: New Motivations for Ecological Restoration.” *Environmental Ethics* 32: 1, 135–47.
- Elliot, Robert. 1997. *Faking Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2000. “Faking Nature.” In *Environmental Restoration: Ethics, Theory, and Practice*, edited by William Throop, 71–82. Amherst: Humanity Books.
- Glazebrook, Trish. 2003. “Art of Nature? Aristotle, Restoration Ecology, and Flowforms.” *Ethics & the Environment* 8:1, 22–36.
- Harris, Richard. “Study Finds Bacteria Ate Most Methane From BP Well <<http://www.npr.org/2011/01/06/132706612/study-finds-bacteria-ate-most-methane-from-bp-well>>,” 6 January 2011, accessed January 12, 2011.
- Hettinger, Ned. 2002. “The Problem of Finding a Positive Role for Humans in the Natural World.” *Ethics & the Environment* 7:1, 109–23.
- Jordan, William R. III. 2000a. “Restoration, Community, and Wilderness.” In *Restoring Nature: Perspectives from the Social Sciences and Humanities*, edited by Paul H. Gobster and R. Bruce Hull, 21–36. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- . 2000b. ““Sunflower Forest”: Ecological restoration as the Basis for a New Environmental Paradigm.” In *Environmental Restoration: Ethics, Theory, and Practice*, edited by William Throop, 205–20. Amherst: Humanity Books.
- . 2003. *Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kane, Stanley. 2000. “Restoration or Preservation? Reflections on the Clash of Environmental Philosophies.” In *Environmental Restoration: Ethics, Theory, and Practice*, edited by William Throop, 22–36. Amherst: Humanity Books.
- Katz, Eric. 1997a. “The Big Lie: Human Restoration of Nature.” In *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community*, edited by William Throop, 93–108. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- . 1997b. “The Call of the Wild: The Struggle Against Domination and the Technological Fix of Nature.” In *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community*, by Eric Katz, 109–20. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . 2002. “Understanding the Moral Limits in the Duality of Artifacts and Nature: A Reply to Critics.” *Ethics & the Environment* 7:1, 138–46.
- Light, Andrew. 2000. “Ecological Restoration and the Culture of Nature: A Pragmatic Perspective.” In *Restoring Nature: Perspectives from the Social Sciences and Humanities*, edited by Paul H. Gobster and R. Bruce Hull, 49–71. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1967. “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. New York: Vintage, 17–27.

- Plumwood, Val. 2002. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge.
- . 2006. "The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture, and Agency in the Land." *Ethics & the Environment* 11:2, 115–50.
- Rolston, Holmes III. 2000. "Restoration." In *Environmental Restoration: Ethics, Theory, and Practice*, edited by William Throop, 127–32. Amherst: Humanity Books.
- . 2004. "The Aesthetic Experience of Forests." In *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, edited by Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, 182–96. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press.
- Turner, Frederick. 2000. "A Field Guide to the Synthetic Landscape." In *Environmental Restoration: Ethics, Theory, and Practice*, edited by William Throop, 195–204. Amherst: Humanity Books.
- Warren, Karen. 1996. "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism." In *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, edited by Karen J. Warren, 21. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.